

Community – Agency Trust: Voyageurs National Park

Joseph M. Schertz - Graduate Research Assistant, University of Minnesota

Dorothy H. Anderson, Ph.D. University of Minnesota

Jerrilyn L. Thompson, National Park Service



Introduction

Since establishment in 1975 local support for the park and the relationship of the park to its local neighbors has been difficult. Community members and park administrators would like the relationship of the park to the local communities to be a more positive one.

Purpose

This poster describes the types and levels of trust community members living adjacent to or in close proximity to Voyageurs National Park, Minnesota have toward the National Park Service (NPS) in general and toward local NPS staff and administrators at Voyageurs.

Methods

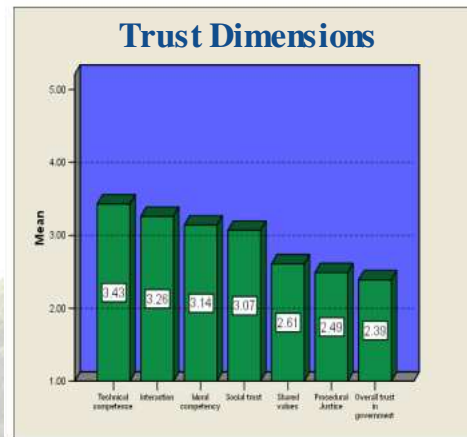
A mailback survey using Dillman's Total Design Method was used to gather data for this study. The sample consisted of community members living in International Falls, Minnesota and other smaller communities adjacent to or in close proximity to Voyageurs National Park.

A total of 996 surveys were mailed and 61.2 percent were returned as usable.

Results

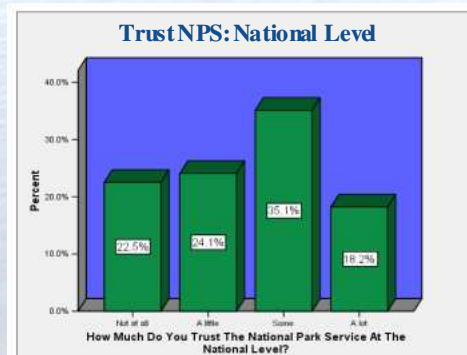
Demographics:

Age: Average 57.8, Range 18 - 92 years
Race: 96.5% White, 3.9% American Indian
Gender: 77%, male; 23% female
Education level: 28.3% high school/GED, 11.2% tech school, 22.6% some college, 22.6% college degree, 11.8% advanced degree
Income: 47.4% > \$50,000



Trust statements were along a five-point scale '1' indicates strong disagreement, '3' indicates neither disagreement nor agreement and a '5' indicates strong agreement with the statement.

- Respondents agree that park staff are well trained and knowledgeable about technical matters, that they generally explain things well, and that they are confident park staff will manage the park well (range = 3.28 - 3.71)
- Respondents tend to agree that park staff give prompt responses, they know who to call when they have a concern about park projects, and they have gotten to know staff. They tend to disagree that the park service is an innovative agency (range = 2.82 - 3.26)



- Respondents agree that park staff are honest and that they are not self-serving in their decision-making. They slightly disagree that park managers really care about what happens to them and that park staff are sensitive to local economic impacts of tourism and recreation (range = 2.90 - 3.59)

- Respondents showed a weak agreement or a weak level of social trust. Respondents agree slightly that most people can be trusted, that if they have a problem someone will help them. They slightly disagree that people are interested in others welfare as well as their own, that people won't take advantage of you, and that you don't need to be too careful when dealing with other people. (range = 2.59 - 3.62)

- Respondents disagree that the park shares their values, has similar goals, supports their view, is like them, or thinks like them (range = 2.45 - 2.70)

- Respondents disagree with the statement that the park's planning process is fair, park management decisions reflect public input, and that citizens have a voice in park projects (range = 2.42 - 2.52)

- Most respondents said they were skeptical of government agencies and did not feel connected to government (range = 1.78 - 2.97)



Over time respondent trust in the National Park Service has not fluctuated significantly; little difference exists between respondent's overall trust in the NPS at the national level and the local level. However, fewer respondents at the local level report an improvement of their level of trust in the NPS than at the national level.

Discussion

Respondents believe park staff and administrators are technically and morally competent. However most respondents do not believe the park shares their values or that park planning processes and management decisions are fair. Moreover, a large number of respondents say that their trust in Voyageur's staff over time has worsened. In 2005 the leadership at the park changed. Community members and park staff believe the change will allow them to increase communication, collaboration, and cooperation on a number of issues of concern. Both the park and community members are determined to use the results of this study to begin conversations that will result in a better understanding of the ways in which community members value the park and surrounding areas and better ways to proactively engage in park issues that impact the lives and livelihoods of community members.

